

For Immediate Release March 14, 2006

## Committee approves Brown, Birkholz legislation to protect state parks

Contact: Jennifer Riedel

(517) 373-5932

**LANSING** – Legislation designed to protect Michigan's state parks was approved by the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs today, said state Sens. Cameron S. Brown and Patty Birkholz.

"The Michigan Senate is working hard to protect and preserve our park system for future generations," said Brown, R-Fawn River Township. "I sponsored such important legislation to help ensure that our parks will be here for our children's children to enjoy."

Senate Bill 971, sponsored by Brown, would require that the State Park Advisory Committee study any Michigan Department of Natural Resources proposal to sell a state park. In addition, the DNR would be required to hold a public hearing in the vicinity of the park prior to proposing a sale.

Brown's bill would prevent the DNR from selling a state park – making it a special act requiring approval from the Legislature.

"There currently is no provision in state law requiring legislative review of any proposal to sell a state park," Brown said. "This legislation will require a review as well as involving the newly created state parks advisory committee in evaluating the merits of any such proposal. We need to ensure that there is a process in place that will prevent our state parks from being sold out from under us without any direct input from the Legislature or the residents of our great state who cherish the parks."

Birkholz's SB 972 would prevent the DNR from designating state park land as "surplus land" without specific legislative approval.

Under Michigan law the DNR is allowed to declare any land it owns as surplus land and put it up for sale.

"It is outrageous to think of a state park as surplus land – a state park is a natural treasure for everyone to enjoy, not something you should sell for development," said Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township. "There are ways to save money during tight budget times. Selling state parks is not one of them. It would be a huge mistake to deprive our residents and visitors the opportunity to enjoy what Michigan has to offer."

SBs 971 and 972 will now go before the full Senate for consideration.